# T/TAC Link Lines

Training & Technical Assistance Center
The College of William and Mary

## *I Can't Read:* Providing Access to the Curriculum Without Reading
By Louise LeBron, M.S.

**Mark** [a sixth grader]**:** I can't read that book.
**Me** [Teacher]**:** Why not?
**Mark:** It's way too hard.
**Me:** How do you know it's too hard?
**Mark:** Well, it's so thick. And the words, you know the print, it's little. And there're no pictures [running through the book]; hey, there are *no* pictures. Yeah, this book is hard.
**Me:** You want to try reading a few pages to see if it really is a hard book?
**Mark:** No need. It's too hard. I can't read it [handing the book back to me].

(Beers, 2003, pp. 16-17)

How often have you had this kind of conversation with a student when he is choosing a book to read? The student seems to lack confidence in his ability to read and views reading with a negative attitude. Beers (2003) describes these students as "dependent readers." Characterized by a variety of learning styles and cognitive abilities, they often find it challenging to predict outcomes, clarify vocabulary, create questions while reading, identify main ideas and themes, and summarize the story. Yet these strategies—employed before, during, and after reading—contribute to the ability to derive meaning from reading (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Proficient readers employ these strategies independently while reading. Students who are dependent readers do not. Learning how to comprehend what is read is an individual process. No one particular reading method works for all students at all times. Therefore, reading instruction must employ individualized and creative methods to successfully enhance comprehension for all learners (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000).

### *Inside this issue …*

For students who are not fluent readers, including students who have disabilities, explicit instruction of comprehension strategies must be an integral part of reading instruction at all grade levels (Forness, 2001). This is especially true at the secondary level, where understanding of critical content is required, and students are expected to have moved from *learning to read* to *reading to learn* (Richardson, Morgan, & Fleener, 2006). Mastering critical content in social studies or science, for example, poses reading demands that are problematic for secondary students who struggle with the mechanics of reading (Dieker & Little, 2005). That is, secondary students who have not mastered basic reading skills labor with text-dependent reading activities, expending most of their energy on decoding without gaining meaning (Virginia Department of Education, 2001).

Secondary reading instruction should be designed to be more experiential; more authentic, less about reading skill, and more about experiences that expose students to the essential knowledge of the curriculum. Researched-based instructional strategies that provide movement and collaboration, supply prior knowledge, provide for connections, are flexible, and engage a variety of modalities create these experiences in learning for both special and general education students without requiring them to read text print (Abell, Bauder, & Simmons, 2005). See the Researched-Based Instructional Strategy insert.

Other supports for literacy experiences created for a variety of learners include the expanding world of digital formats, software programs, online resources, video resources, and assistive technology. Digital formats allow students with a variety of abilities to access, interact with, and learn from the curriculum. Both general and special education students benefit from technology resources that are tailored to their unique learning styles (Abell et al., 2005). Several types of technology are available to support secondary students before, during, and after literacy instruction within content areas. An example of assistive technology used to enhance pre-reading skills such as vocabulary study is the **Reading Pen** (WixCom Technologies, Inc.) which features text-to-speech technology, thesaurus, and dictionary capabilities. **Franklin** (Franklin, Inc.) talking dictionaries and spell checkers offer a variety of products that provide syllabication, spelling, definitions, synonyms, and homonyms, and translate words into other languages. **Inspiration** and **Kidspiration** (Inspiration, Inc.) are software programs that provide graphic organizer templates to preview the text or access prior knowledge before required reading. **READ 180** (Scholastic, Inc.) supports students in grades 4-12 with limited prior knowledge in the core content areas. For example, *READ 180* offers short anchor videos supplying background information to increase comprehension of related text passages.

To engage students while they read, **Inspiration 7.6** and **Kidspiration 2.1** may be employed. These software programs create advance organizers to improve understanding of comparisons, cause-and-effect relationships, and connections between main ideas and details. **Digital books** (eText, eBooks, or electronic books) featuring downloadable webtext and text-to-speech technology may be used with a personal computer, **PDA** (personal digital assistant), or **Dana** (Alphasmart, Inc.). These tools allow students to hear curricular textbook material or novels read aloud, resulting in the ability to keep pace with the curricular demands and greater mastery of content. Increasingly, PDA use is valued by secondary students for the read-aloud capabilities, as well as for notetaking, beaming of class notes and assignments, automatic reminders, communicating, and recording of grades to self-monitor progress (Abell et al., 2005). Free eBook downloads are available through **Microsoft Reader** (Microsoft, Inc.), textbook publishers, and university libraries. **Readplease** (Readplease, Inc.)*,* a free eBook website, is compatible with mp3 and iPod players.

Further, deciphering main events and details, drawing inferences, and determining literary themes are accelerated by technology that features scanning print-into-word document formats, voice-to-print, and read-aloud capabilities. Programs such as **SOLO** (Don Johnson, Inc.) offers **Draftbuilder***,* **Write Outloud***,* and **Read Outloud** in one program. This package builds skills in content area reading, research projects, and essay writing. Pre-writing templates help students organize information, and the voice-to-print technology assists students in accurately revising and editing their work. **Read & Write Gold** (TextHELP Ltd.) features text-to-speech options for reading and word prediction software for use with the writing process. **Microsoft**

**Word** (Microsoft, Inc.) also includes the voice-to-print feature to aid students with the reading and writing process. New to the product line of assistive technology for writing is the ***Fly Pentop*** (LeapFrog, Inc.). This device uses scanning technology to allow students to write or draw on paper and interact with what they have written or drawn. For example, a student could draw a calculator and then tap the buttons on the drawn calculator to prompt the *Fly Pentop* to speak the answer; or a student might write a word in English and hear it translated into Spanish. The *Fly Pentop* also plays music.

Available to all classroom teachers via the internet is educational technology that provides Web-based digital video resources across the content areas accompanied by lesson plans and activities. An example of this type of educational technology is ***unitedstreaming*** from Discovery Education. This video library showcases high-quality video clips designed to be used within classroom instruction. Teachers may choose from full-length videos to concept clips across K-12 core curriculum subjects that are easily aligned with state standards. This medium brings to life content area studies for all students. See the Technology Resources insert for more information.

Two resources are available to assist educators in researching and choosing appropriate technology resources for classroom instruction. The first is the **Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)**. Based on the principles of Universal Design for Learners, CAST's website includes professional development opportunities, consultation, publications, and online resources for curricular materials (www.CAST.org, 2005). Another resource for teachers is the **Virginia Society for Technology in Education (VSTE)**. A free online membership to VSTE offers opportunities to access their electronic journal, annual conference information, and online resource information (www.vste.org, 2005). Both of these sites are excellent guides for teachers seeking information on technology-based resources for classroom instruction.

In summary, content area instruction that has traditionally been dependent on reading should integrate a variety of modalities, and be flexible, strategic, creative and entertaining, and adapted to individual needs (NICHD, 2000). Using research-based instructional strategies integrated with assistive and educational technology resources, general and special educators collaboratively can help all students meet the challenge of accessing the general education curriculum (Abell et al., 2005; Hasselbring & Bausch, 2005).

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## Collaborative Leadership
## The Forgotten Art of Formative Assessment
By Christopher R. Gareis, Ed.D.

We live in an era of accountability. You might even say that we live in the era of the standardized test, given the role that high-stakes assessments now play in the educational process. Thus, standardized tests have become our schools' "measures of success," "performance benchmarks," "value-added indicators," and a host of other business-like terms intended to equate quantitative test scores with learning. In more ancient parlance, you could say that standardized assessments have become the "coin of the realm."

I do not intend to disparage the call for accountability. Neither do I intend to denigrate the role of standards in the curriculum nor the use of standardized assessments as *one* measure of learning. These both play necessary and important roles in the mission of our public schools to provide equal and equitable educational opportunity to all students. My concern, however, is the eclipsing effect high-stakes assessments are having on teachers' constructive use of *assessment as an instructional strategy*. In our drive to summatively assess student learning, we may be forgetting *why* and *how* to formatively assess student learning in the classroom.

**What is formative assessment?** Formative assessment is not a new idea. It has been around as long as teaching has. Socrates' *modus docendi* (i.e., his "preferred way of teaching") was to question the learner. What we now call the "Socratic method" essentially amounts to using questions to assess understanding, to guide learning, and, ultimately, to foster critical thinking. More recently, Gronlund (2006) has written that formative assessment is intended "to monitor student progress during instruction…to identify the students' learning successes and failures so that adjustments in instruction and learning can be made" (p. 6). Airasian (2001) has defined formative assessment as "the process of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting information for the purpose of improving student learning while instruction is taking place" (p. 421). Basically, formative assessment is any means by which a teacher figures out what students are getting and what they are not getting—in the classroom, for the purpose of teaching and learning, but not for purposes of grading.

**What evidence is there that formative assessment matters?** While the concept of formative assessment itself is not new, what is new is the evidence of the extraordinary effectiveness of formative assessment in teaching and learning. Since the late 1990s, the Assessment Reform Group (1999) has gained considerable attention for its research in England, Canada, and the United States regarding the effectiveness of formative assessment. Among many findings, the research group has concluded that improved formative assessment practices in classrooms typically yield gains in student achievement roughly equivalent to one to two grade levels in learning (Assessment Reform Group, 1999). The instructional power of formative assessment is echoed in the well-known meta-analysis of effective instructional strategies led by Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001), which identified *providing feedback*--a central principle of formative assessment--as one of nine categories of instructional strategies that have statistically significant effects on student achievement. Indeed, Marzano and colleagues even quote a previous researcher as saying, "The most powerful single modification that enhances achievement is feedback" (Hattie, in Marzano et al., 2001, p. 96).

**What does formative assessment look like in the classroom?** Frankly, everything students do has potential value as formative assessment. Assessments may range from:
- oral responses to written responses
- physical performances to inactivity
- completing practice worksheets to engaging in peer conferences
- taking conventional quizzes to creating graphic representations of a concept
- computing math problems on personal dry-erase boards to indicating the level of understanding with a simple thumbs-up or thumbs-down

Formative assessments take myriad forms in the classroom and are as unique to individual teachers as are instructional styles. Yet, as with classroom instruction, several core principles characterize the most effective formative assessment practices. Adapting from the Assessment Reform Group (1999), three basic principles of formative assessment follow.

**1) Formative assessment is integral to instruction.** Unlike summative assessment, which occurs after instruction, formative assessment is *part of* instruction. Consider it this way: If the intent of teaching is to get students to think, then the intent of formative assessment is to make students' thinking *visible* to the teacher. That is, formative assessment should help a teacher determine what the students are getting, what they're missing, and what needs to happen next. To provide this information to the teacher and students, formative assessment must be close in time to instruction. The teacher's aim in the classroom is to make *timely* decisions about the next steps of instruction based upon evidence of student learning that is available *right now*. Formative assessment can even serve *simultaneously* as an instructional strategy. For example, during a *K-W-L* activity, students write what they already know *(K)* about the topic at hand and what they want *(W)* to learn about that topic. These two prompts function not only as an anticipatory set for instruction, but also as a means for the teacher to determine students' current level of understanding. Then, after instruction, students describe what they have learned *(L)*, which serves both as a reinforcing instructional activity and also as a timely assessment of learning.

**2) Formative assessment requires constructive feedback.** Too often we equate assessments with grades. However, conventional grading schemes, such as letter grades and percentages, are typically inadequate for conveying meaningful information about the particular strengths, gaps, and next steps for students. Effective formative assessment should be *honest, specific,* and *timely.* Disingenuous praise (e.g., "Good work") can convey a false sense of mastery to a student who, in fact, has made fundamental and correctable errors in her work. Similarly, stock phrases and letter grades do not communicate specific elements of strength or shortcomings in a student's thinking or application of skills. Feedback that is separated from performance by days or even weeks (such as often happens with teachers marking major projects or tests) becomes meaningless and, thus, largely useless to students. The teacher's purpose for providing feedback in formative assessment is to answer two questions for the student: (1) How am I progressing in achieving what I set out to learn? and (2) What do I need to do to continue my progress? Therefore, the teacher's feedback, whether written or oral, should provide answers to these questions for the student.

**3) Formative assessment fosters student involvement.** When used effectively, formative assessment is sensitive to the role of motivation in learning. Teachers and students come to value the fact that making mistakes is inherent to learning. Mistakes are not depreciatory events, and they do not affect final grades. Teachers come to articulate learning goals clearly, and students come to internalize the criteria for achieving those goals. Through formative assessment activities, students develop a host of important tacit learning outcomes. Namely, students develop the ability to ask meaningful questions, to respond constructively to feedback from others, to provide useful feedback to peers, to monitor their own progress, and to reflect actively on their own learning. Ultimately, the aim of formative assessment is to enable students to self-assess--that is, to monitor, respond to, and direct their own learning both within and beyond the classroom.

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### Family Partnerships
### Making Sense of Grading in Inclusive Settings
By Lee Anne Sulzberger, M.Ed.

Assigning grades to class work, homework, tests, and projects is a standard practice in schools. However, when family members see grades that are either higher or lower than expected they are often confused, leading to questions such as "Is this an accurate representation of what my child knows?" or "What exactly does this grade mean?" The meaning of grades is often particularly uncertain when a student with disabilities is receiving instruction in the general education classroom.

Asking teachers the following questions may help family members make better sense of the grades their children receive in school.

**What grading practices are used in the class?**
Wood (2001) and Salend (2004) note that grades may take many forms. Letter grades, pass/fail, and credit/no credit options are probably the most familiar. Other grading practices may include use of checklists, student contracts, portfolios of student work samples, or grades based on ability, effort, and achievement. Some teachers also assign grades that indicate student progress toward meeting IEP goals.

**How is the responsibility for determining my child's grade shared by the general education teacher and the special education teacher?**
Sharing the responsibility for assigning grades ensures that the grades more accurately reflect student progress and performance. Shared grading also provides valuable information as the teachers plan for instruction that meets students' individual needs.

**How are expectations and grading procedures communicated to family members and students?**
In addition to sharing introductory information regarding grading and expectations at open houses and letters sent home at the beginning of the year, clear written guidelines on assignments and projects throughout the year help ensure that both students and families have a clear understanding of how students will be graded in class and on particular assignments. Posting grading guidelines and results on school division/teacher websites is another way to communicate between home and school.

**What types of assessments are used in addition to traditional testing in this class?**
Students learn in a variety of ways, so it makes sense that they are assessed in a variety of ways. It is important that students become familiar with the format and structure of standardized assessments required for all students by taking tests that mirror the structure and content. However, teachers may provide other ways for students to demonstrate their content knowledge that respect their learning preferences and styles. For example, students may choose projects, presentations, skits, or the like to demonstrate understanding and knowledge in creative ways.

**What grading adaptations may be considered?**
Silva, Munk, and Bursuck (2005) describe grading adaptations as "procedures or strategies that can be used to individualize the grading system for a student with disabilities" (p. 88). It is important to remember that most students with disabilities in Virginia will be participating in the Standards of Learning curriculum and assessments. Therefore, grades must accurately reflect progress in the curriculum. Adaptations such as including comments based on written anecdotal records may capture additional information such as progress toward assignment completion and independent work habits.

By working in partnership, families, students, and teachers help to ensure that student grades accurately reflect student progress and performance. For further information on grading practices, consult the T/TAC website at http://www.wm.edu/ttac.

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# Check It Out!

The following materials are available on loan from the T/TAC William and Mary lending library. To request materials, please call 1-800-323-4489 and leave a message. The materials will be sent to you along with a postage-paid return mailer. A complete listing of **Start-to-Finish Books** is available through the T/TAC William and Mary lending library and may be viewed at http://www.wm.edu/ttac. Simply click on the "Library" link to view holdings, complete an online search, or order materials.

## Start-to-Finish Books
### Published by Don Johnston Incorporated

As teachers collaborate to provide meaningful and accessible instruction to all students including students with disabilities, they often ponder how to help the struggling readers in the upper-elementary, middle, and high school grades. Since there are few age-appropriate resources available for older students with reading difficulties that permit them to practice the skills they need to become proficient readers, teachers may scramble for these resources. **Start-to-Finish Books** provide libraries of paperback books and audio books on various topics such as adventure, history, classic literature (*Romeo and Juliet*) and short stories, mysteries, and sports biographies. This resource helps students become skilled in all six dimensions of reading as outlined by the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education's Reading Excellence Act (2002):

- The skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes, or speech sounds, are connected to print;
- The ability to decode unfamiliar words;
- The ability to read fluently;
- Sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension;
- The development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print; and
- The development and maintenance of a motivation to read.

These books are designed to be used in addition to a strong reading and word study program. Components of the system are provided below.

| For Students | For Teachers |
|---|---|
| Audiocassette for pre-reading listening or post-reading follow-along to model rate and intonation | Allows ways to manage class lists, set individual reading purposes, select general preferences, and view collected data from *Teacher Central* |
| CD for independent experience in fluent reading at any skill level | Data for **clicked-on words** provide a comprehensive list of words students clicked on for help during reading |
| Paperback book for independent and age-appropriate literacy experience for older reader with beginning third-grade reading skills | Data **for quizzes** include time on task, correct choice, student choice, and percent correct for every quiz a student completes |
| On the computer screen, books are presented one page at a time, with word-by-word highlighting paired with speech | Data for **fluency practice activities** include time on task and the saved audio files from the student's recording |
| On the computer screen, students can click on individual words to hear them pronounced | Blank quizzes and fluency activities may be printed from *Teacher Central* to provide off-computer fluency and comprehension activities |
| Key words are divided into syllables, accented, and used in example sentences | |

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## Self-Management Can Be Sweet!
By Kristin Holst, M.Ed.

*She stares forlornly at the "Death by Chocolate" mocking her from the pages of her favorite bistro's dessert menu. She would love to end its taunting, but knows she would pay the price for this sweet indulgence when she returned home and had to add its billion points to her food journal.* With approximately 44,000 meetings in 30 countries around the world, a leading diet firm is an excellent model of just how effective self-monitoring and peer pressure can be.

Teachers who instruct students with disabilities in general education settings need proven, effective strategies for dealing with behavioral issues, so that academics can take center stage in the classroom. Self-management strategies offer one way to reduce time spent on behavior management and increase time spent on instruction. With self-management, a student monitors his or her own behavior, and then records the behavior occurrences on a data collection form. The student may then evaluate his or her progress by graphing these data (Gunter, Miller, Venn, Thomas, & House, 2002).

A comprehensive series of 34 self-management studies revealed that the proper use of self-monitoring techniques promoted engagement in instruction, appropriate peer interactions, academic achievement, and appropriate classroom behaviors, while simultaneously reducing incidents of problem behaviors. Self-management is deemed particularly successful for students with behavior disorders across primary and secondary grade levels (Project REACH, 2005). Specifically, it increases student responsibility and also creates accountability for proper and improper actions.

While self-management systems were initially begun in special education classrooms, the advent of inclusion has made these strategies equally valuable in other settings. For example, Mitchem and Wells (2002) outlined a self-management program that can be utilized in a general education setting. The Classwide Peer-assisted Self-Management Program (CWPASM) combines self-management with peer matching and support.

In order to be effective, a self-management system must be well organized and structured. The CWPASM ensures that:
- Students receive an overview of self-management (e.g., definition and benefits).
- Teachers ensure students have a clear understanding of classroom rules (e.g., treat everyone with respect, stay on task, follow directions, raise your hand to speak).
- Students learn the ABCs of behavior (Antecedents, Behaviors, and Consequences) and apply these principles to the classroom rules.
- Students are taught and practice evaluating how well they and a partner are following classroom rules.
- Students select three peers with whom they would like to be partnered.
- Teachers assign partners based on student input.
- Teachers assign partners to one of two class teams. Team composition varies weekly.
- Teachers determine the interval for cueing the students to evaluate their own and their partner's behaviors (e.g., every 15 minutes).
- Students evaluate both their own behavior and their partner's on point cards.
- Students earn a point for each appropriate behavior recorded on their cards.
- Students earn a bonus point if their evaluation matches their partner's.

- Points earned are compiled and contribute to the team score.
- Team winners are announced at the end of each school day.
- The team that earns the most points in a given week chooses from a menu of rewarding activities on Friday.

Much like the aforementioned dieting system, peer-assisted self-monitoring procedures encourage appropriate behavior through mutual support and personal responsibility. Self-monitoring empowers students to make the right decisions and prepares them for the adult world where they are expected to act in an acceptable manner on their own. As H. Jackson Browne once said, "Our character is what we do when we think no one else is looking."

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**Mark Your Calendar!**

**7th Annual Colonial Institute**
*Running on Empty? Refill Your Tank with Effective Strategies*
**June 29, 2006**
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**The Colonial Institute is designed to enhance the planning and instructional skills of educators who teach students with disabilities in the SOL curriculum. The 2006 Institute will focus on research-based behavioral and instructional strategies.**

**Target Audience: Teams consisting of administrators, special educators, general educators, and remedial teachers and/or related service personnel who work with students with mild to moderate disabilities in grades 4-12 in the SOL curriculum.**

**Registration materials and detailed session information will be mailed shortly. Visit www.wm.edu/ttac for the latest Colonial Institute information!**

## Transition Time
## The Relationship Between Postsecondary Goals and Transition Services
By Dale Pennell, C.A.S.
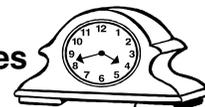
Section 61 4(d) (1) (A) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) requires Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to develop "appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and independent living skills, where appropriate" for students of transition age.

Measurable postsecondary goals are different from measurable annual goals. *Postsecondary goals* capture students' visions of adult life, whereas *annual goals* address the means by which students access the secondary school coursework and other educational experiences that will enable them to successfully pursue their postsecondary goals.   Each local education agency decides where postsecondary goals are recorded in the IEP, but these goals are to be written *prior* to the development of measurable annual goals.  Below are examples of postsecondary goals that address adult life.

### Training
- Amanda will complete the police academy
- Trey will complete a plumbing apprenticeship
- Doris will complete a military training course in fixed wing engine repair
- Misha will meet the assembly line packaging requirements established by his supported employment job coach

### Education
- Briana will earn a baccalaureate degree in music
- Mohammed will earn an associate degree in accounting
- Siegfried will complete art classes of interest offered at the local fine arts center
- Corbin will complete money management and banking classes at the local center for independent living (CIL)

### Employment
- Maya will secure employment as a teller at a local bank
- Ben will join the Marines
- Keith will stock shelves at a local business
- Lola will teach English in a public or private school

### Independent Living
- Emeril will maintain his own room/apartment/home
- Gustav will participate in a recreational soccer league
- Juanita will manage her schedule for taking prescribed medications
- Portia will participate in local, state, and national elections

Appropriately designed postsecondary goals may inform the development of meaningful transition services, also proscribed in IDEA 2004 (Section 614(d) (1) (A)). These services address coursework and other educational activities that provide students prerequisite knowledge and skills to achieve their postsecondary goals.

Before IEP teams design these services, they should review students' postsecondary goals and concurrently consider the following questions:

- What specific secondary coursework will prepare students to achieve postsecondary goals?
- What specific instructional activities will enable students to acquire the skills necessary to achieve their postsecondary goals?
- What related services do students now receive that they will continue to need as adults? What will be the process for linking students to these resources so that they may achieve their postsecondary goals?
- What community experiences (governmental, social, recreational, leisure, business, transportation) do students need to participate in community life as they envision it through their postsecondary goals?
- What activities do students need that address the development of work-related behaviors, including career exploration, and job seeking and keeping skills so that they may achieve their postsecondary goals?
- For what adult living skills, such as opening a checking account, do students need preparation if they are to achieve their postsecondary goals?
- What skills of daily living, those personal activities that adults do regularly, do students need to acquire? What activities can address these needs so that students may achieve their postsecondary goals?
- Do students need functional vocational evaluations in order to achieve postsecondary goals?

Transition services strategically designed and implemented in response to these questions increase the likelihood that students with disabilities achieve their postsecondary goals.

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Behavior/Moderate Disabilities Specialist
(757) 221-1927, dbdoer@wm.edu

**Sue Land,** Co-Director and
Inclusion Specialist
(757) 221-1925, saland@wm.edu

**Dr. Gail Hardinge**
Behavior/Effective Schoolwide Discipline Specialist
(757) 221-2361, gbhard@wm.edu

**Kristin Holst**
Secondary Education/Behavior Specialist
(757) 221-5086, kjhols@wm.edu

**Louise LeBron**
Inclusion/Instructional Support Team Specialist
(757) 221-7821, llsmit@wm.edu

**Dale Pennell**
Secondary and Transition Specialist
(757) 221-1708, dppenn@wm.edu

**Tina Spencer**
Inclusion/Standards of Learning (SOL) Specialist
(757) 221-7822, clspen@wm.edu

**Donni Stickney**
Inclusion/Instructional Support Team Specialist
(757) 221-7736, dlstic@wm.edu

**Lee Anne Sulzberger**
Secondary Education Specialist
(757) 221-2313, lasulz@wm.edu

**Cindy Catlett**
Administrative Assistant
(757) 221-5052, cacatl@wm.edu

### T/TAC LINK LINES EDITORS:

**Sue Land**
Managing Editor

**Dr. Lori Korinek**
Executive Editor

**Cindy Catlett**
Layout & Design

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